WORKERS VANGUARD

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No. 1186 — August 2025

LABOR UNDER TRUMP

What Union Militants Should Do

Top left: Seventeen immigrant workers arrested during June 11 ICE raid, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Top right: March 25 rally in New York City in defense of federal workers facing job cuts.

ICE; Eduardo Munoz/Reuters

The following is an edited version of the main presentation by Maria Palacio at a workers conference hosted by the Spartacist League/U.S. in New York City last month.

Trump's second presidency has sent shockwaves throughout the world as he smashes up the liberal status quo in order to reassert U.S. imperialism's global dominance. Internationally, the Trump administration has attacked Iran, propped up Israel and continues to squeeze Latin America, especially its colony, Puerto Rico. At home, we've seen escalating police repression, ICE raids of hospitals, schools, farms and workplaces while a financial recession hangs over our heads.

Trump isn't just some accidental tyrant of Western democracy, carelessly stomping on the world. Right now, he is U.S. imperialism's best guy to protect their core interests as they get ready for bigger conflicts with other countries. In the last 30 years of the liberal status quo, U.S. economic dominance has slipped. That's because major industry was shipped off to the Global South as the U.S. military intervened in one country after the next, overextending itself in "forever wars." In the meantime, other countries have developed economically, and China has become a major economic power, stepping on the toes of the American imperialists. The imperialists can't have it anymore. To force reindustrialization of the U.S., the ruling class needs Trump to use openly reactionary methods to keep us workers and other countries down. The attacks won't stop anytime soon.

Collective defense actions are needed to give us workers the best possible chance of surviving this period in one piece and being able to fight back further. But we haven't seen any serious working-class resistance. That's because the current trade-union leaderships—regardless of whether they back Trump or the Democrats—have made the unions weak and passive, begging for scraps off the masters' table. They refuse to mobilize the unions to beat back the bosses' attacks, forget about Trump's broader attacks, because doing so would piss off the ruling class whose empire they support.

Because of these misleaders, workers in one industry after another are atomized and pitted against each other by race, tier and craft, to name a few ways. All these divisions are obstacles to uniting the class even for small-scale defensive actions. But it didn't and doesn't have to be this way. Coming out of the pandemic, the working class was ready to fight for what it had lost, and major class battles

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How to Avoid Another AOC Situationship

We reprint below an August 6 statement released by the Just Break Already caucus and distributed at the 2025 DSA National Convention in Chicago. The DSA Left claimed a major victory when the convention adopted the resolution "For a Fighting Anti-Zionist DSA," which makes support to Israel an expellable offense. But this is meaningless absent a fight to actually expel the genocide apologists. Scheduled votes to censure AOC and Zionist L.A. City Council member Nithya Raman were not even held and were instead referred to the incoming National Political Committee (NPC). It remains to be seen whether or not the new Left-majority NPC will issue even the mildest rebuke of these Democrats, much less enforce anti-Zionist standards.

* * *

Zohran's victory in the Democratic Party's NYC mayoral primary has launched him into the stratosphere and made him the DSA's new socialist superstar. Socialism is (again) said to be "in the air," and the candidate has been crowned the savior of the left in these dark times. But despite all the celebration in every corner of the DSA, we can't help but feel a sense of dread and déjà vu.

A spectre haunts the DSA. Back in 2018, the NPC declared "the rebirth of the American socialist movement" after AOC's defeat of a deep-pocketed Establishment incumbent in the Democratic Congressional primaries. The Democrat AOC getting into office was supposed to be the start of something big. But fast forward to 2025, and she stands completely discredited because of one betrayal after another. From helping spike a national rail strike to voting to send weapons to Israel, AOC has gone from socialist sweetheart to Establishment bootlicker. She

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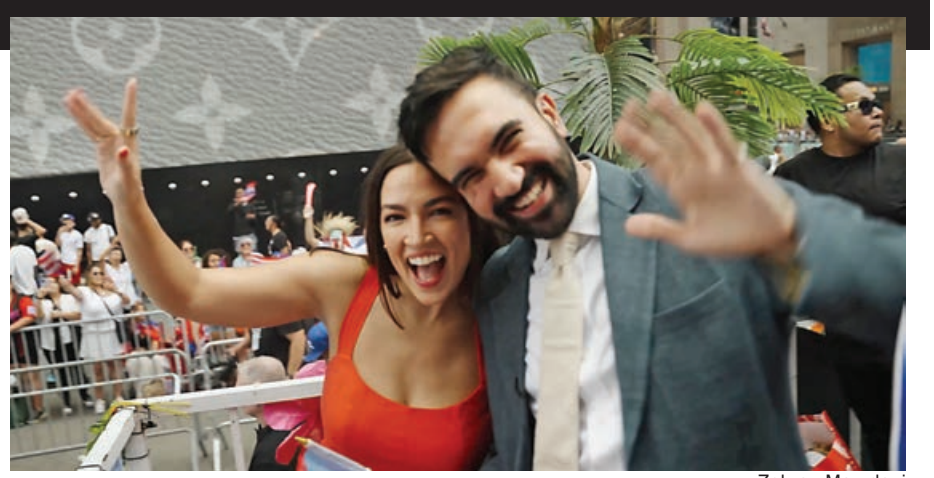

Zohran Mamdani

June 9: Besties AOC and Zohran Mamdani at NYC Puerto Rican Day Parade.

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Zohran...

(continued from page 1)

never waged any real fight to abolish ICE or win Medicare for All or any of the other good-sounding things she talked up. All AOC has accomplished is to keep radical youth in the straitjacket of the Democratic Party of the billionaires, bankers and landlords and to push workers repulsed by the liberal Democrats into the waiting arms of MAGA. The American socialist movement has not been reborn, it has been set back.

The DSA has a type; and if DSAers don't wake up and spot the red flags, they are destined to fall into the same toxic relationship with Zohran, who is walking down AOC's path. Even while he taps into widespread anger over NYC's sky-high cost of living, Zohran has declared his commitment to reviving the Democrats and his willingness to work with the billionaires—the very things that made AOC a sellout. This cannot be accepted if we are actually going to advance the cause of socialism.

Many on the DSA Left acknowledge that Zohran has (often unspecified) "limitations" and propose to build the largest possible movement to counter the pressure of the oligarchy and hold him accountable to the DSA. We all know that the Wall Street vultures and real estate moguls have a million ways to prevent any inroads against their significant vested interests in the status quo. Making NYC affordable will require a confrontation with those interests and a force capable of holding off the city elite and Trump alike. But any movement backing a candidate bound to a major ruling-class machine (the Democratic Party) and who explicitly swears off any such confrontation is not going to be a winner for the left or the working class. The center of gravity in the Democratic Party is the oligarchy, not the DSA—and all Democrats are ultimately accountable to the party's masters.

We have experienced a long line of movements organized around "progressive" Democrats, and none have ended well. Something needs to give. In order to finally break the toxic cycle with the Democratic electeds and stop the DSA from getting screwed again, we offer some bare minimum standards to determine whether Zohran or any other candidate is worthy of our support.

1. No financing from or affiliation with the Democrats!

Dirty-breakers claim that the DSA somehow has a free hand to use the Democratic ballot line for its own purposes and without those who call the party's shots placing any conditions on the electeds. Let's get real, even Biden got kicked off the Democratic ticket without a vote when it became clear he would drag them down.

The Democratic electeds are considered the crowning achievement of the DSA, but they're really a noose around our necks. They are ***useful for the Establishment*** because they restrain social movements and redirect them back into the Democratic camp, where they are safely buried. Rashida Tlaib went the furthest in criticizing the Democrats for the genocide of her own people in Gaza; yet she ***still*** wouldn't break with them. Instead, she opted for the "uncommitted" campaign, which held out false hope to pro-Palestinian protesters that the party of genocide could change, only to predictably commit to Kamala despite her ironclad support for Israel.

Kyle Mazza/Abaca Press

Brooklyn, August 5: Mamdani cozies up to cops at NYPD's "National Night Out Against Crime." He wants them to do "their actual jobs," i.e., terrorize black people and Latinos.

Democratic politicians, whatever their background and starting point, will have a career only if they work to sustain their party and the ruling-class interests it represents. The more political sway they seek to have, the more they must align with the Establishment to get political backing from higher-ups, fundraising support, etc. And if they don't, the Establishment will drive them out, one way or another. Any such purge would not be an exposure of the Establishment or a step forward for socialism either, as some dirty-breakers argue. The working class already widely hates the Democrats and views the left groups that are hitched to the Democrats as irrelevant. To gain credibility among workers, the goal must be to lay out a real working-class alternative to both Trump and the Democrats.

For Zohran's campaign to warrant even critical support from DSAers, he must first declare total financial, organizational and political independence from the Democrats. This includes both leaving the party and refusing to caucus with them.

2. Oppose Zionism!

Many support Zohran because of his pro-Palestinian credentials, and he has been met with the full weight of the Democratic Establishment for even the smallest nods to Palestine. This is to be expected—the strategic interests of U.S. imperialism are tightly tied to Zionism. In response, though, Zohran has steadily ceded ground to the Zionists, like his disavowing the use of the slogan "globalize the intifada." He often couples his (recently less frequent) comments against the genocide with declarations of support to Israel's right to exist.

But the current Israeli state is based on the eradication of the Palestinian people. Socialists must oppose Zionism and be clear that the Zionist state's existence is incompatible with Palestinian liberation. We cannot continue to support candidates who fail to take a stand on an issue as urgent and clear-cut as a genocide. Unless Zohran comes out openly against Zionism, he is failing to draw the most basic line needed to advance the fight to free Palestine or any other struggle against U.S. imperialism.

3. For black liberation! Open the police archives!

Many in the DSA praise Zohran for supposedly finding the blueprint to winning back rightward-moving workers turned off by liberal identity politics: stick to the single message of affordability. But dropping any fight on behalf of the oppressed as "divisive" is not an asset, but rather a further obstacle to uniting working people in defense of their interests because it leaves in place all the pre-existing divisions tearing the class apart.

Even something as basic as quality, affordable housing runs straight up against the scarcity of decent options and the segregated setup in NYC. Zohran's refusal to even attempt to break down racial and other divisions is a gift to the bankers and landlords who will seize on these divisions as they always do to weaken struggle and tighten their grip.

And you will never win over NYC's black and brown masses if you won't take a side against the police, who murder and terrorize them. Zohran has made clear that he doesn't want to make an enemy of the NYPD—or even to defund them, a demand he once supported like many liberal Democrats. Instead, Zohran wants to relieve the cops of their social-work duties, which are "preventing them from doing their actual jobs"—like bashing in the heads of black and brown people. At a recent community event, Zohran professed his respect for the NYPD before an audience of police officers.

On the campaign trail, Zohran has brought attention to Bangladeshi teen Win Rozario, gunned down in his apartment by the NYPD while having a mental health crisis. Over a year later, Win's killers are still free, while the city makes his family deal with endless red tape. Any socialist elected should jump at the chance to expose the capitalist state's crimes kept behind lock and key.

DSAers who think Zohran is a step in the right direction for the working class and oppressed should demand he open the police archives and fight to put away the cops who murdered Win Rozario, Eric Garner, Saniyah Cheatham, Eric Duprey and countless others. As mayor, Zohran would have the ability to fulfill these basic measures of self-defense for all working-class New Yorkers. But where does he stand—with the workers and oppressed or with the ruling class?

* * *

We cannot keep doing the same thing over and over and expect different results—that's the very definition of insanity. The DSA has got to get some standards and stop throwing itself at the feet of every aspiring politician who comes knocking at our door. How many times are we going to go down this road, just to get crushed yet again? In chasing after Zohran, dirty-breakers have shown themselves to be virtually indistinguishable from the DSA Right—all talk of a break has been thrown out. The tried-and-untrue strategy of the dirty break only condemns the DSA to a repeat of AOC and damages the broader socialist movement. We need and deserve better—for a ***clean break now!*** ■

Letter

On Marxist Work in the DSA

8 February 2025

To the editor:

Just Break Already, the only true clean-break-now caucus in the Democratic Socialists of America, characterizes the DSA as "part of the Democratic Party." This isn't a matter of stray loose language: The caucus reaffirmed that view in response to pushback.

An individual opponent persists in hammering this point online. He insists it's a smoking gun proving that JBA, with the Spartacist League's support, is operating within the bourgeois Democratic Party.

The objection looks formalistic. And it points toward cutting Marxists off from the compelling opportunity to fight from inside the largest U.S. socialist organization by far to win over substantial numbers of subjective revolutionaries. (At the same time, it seems more than odd that left organizations which regularly seize chances to find fault with the SL—notably those that spun out of it, plus WSWS/SEP—wouldn't make much more hay of this argument.)

Still, the stubborn criticism involves a matter of principle, and I'm not clear that it has been addressed directly, let alone effectively. I'd greatly appreciate your taking it up in some detail.

Some educated discussion on Facebook centered on the idea that Communist entry into the Chinese Kuomintang in the 1920s was not unprincipled, after all. That concept and its relevance definitely seems worthy of elaboration. Comparison and contrast with critical support by your South African affiliate for electoral candidates of the Economic Freedom Fighters could also illuminate matters in a bit broader context.

Last, I'd note my nagging concern that the characterization of the DSA as part of the Democratic Party represents an unforced error. It isn't true in a formal organizational sense; and in my view, it inaccurately and unnecessarily paints a social-democratic organization—not different in kind politically from the Communist Party or Socialist Party in times that they had policies supporting the Democrats—as simply bourgeois.

L.

WV replies:

Thank you for your email, and many apologies for our very late response. Your question about why it is principled for the Just Break Already (JBA) caucus to intervene in the DSA comes up a lot. The question is: Does a fight within the DSA for a clean break from the Democratic Party have the potential to advance the cause of class independence or not? The obvious answer is "yes." The DSA is easily, by orders of magnitude, the largest socialist organization in the U.S. But it suffers from a massive contradiction: It is attached to a major imperialist party. A successful fight to break this link—convincing revolutionary-minded DSAers to stand up for class independence and those more comfortable among the Democrats to fully reveal themselves—would be a real step forward for the American socialist movement.

All of the JBA's activity is geared toward waging this very fight (see its recent statements "Dirty Break Serves Only the Dems—DSA: For a Clean Break Now!" and "How to Avoid Another AOC Situationship"). To renounce ***all*** work inside the DSA, as propounded by some sectarian critics of the JBA like the Internationalist Group, is counterproductive. Doing so confines revolutionaries to yelling sterile denunciations from the sidelines, while giving reformist elements the run of the field in the DSA's internal debate over the best strategy for cohering an independent workers party. The charade of the dirty break—the notion that socialist forces can be brought forth within the bosom of the

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The closing date for news in this issue is August 19.

No. 1186 **AUGUST 2025**

How to Fight Dutertismo

We reprint below an article that originally appeared in the first issue of Talibang Anakpawis *(April 2025), publication of our comrades of the Spartacist Group Pilipinas (Committee of Correspondents Overseas). They also wrote an update to introduce the article.*

Talibang Anakpawis

AUGUST 18—The Philippine midterm elections in May produced miserable results, not least for the far left, which had refused to take up the anti-imperialist banner during the campaign period and instead ingratiated themselves to the pro-U.S. bourgeois liberals at every turn. This capitulation helped bring about the current situation where President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. (BBM) retains control and the most open U.S. lackeys dominate Congress.

The far left failed to achieve the main goals they set for the elections. The Supreme Court ruled against the impeachment of Vice President Sara Duterte, known for the same brand of right-wing populism (Dutertismo) as her father, former president Rodrigo; and the national minimum wage bill stalled in the outgoing Congress. The left did not know what to do in response because they fully embraced liberal parliamentarism and confined the struggle to that framework. The Makati Business Club, which is well connected to foreign finance capital, has for its own reasons now raised concerns about the impeachment decision.

As the U.S. escalates pressure on the Philippines, the oligarchy has buried its factional differences and capitulated to Trump's tariff and trade demands. All the while, tensions have been simmering in the South China Sea. The Philippine bourgeoisie, including the liberals, are solidly behind the U.S., and the Akbayan Party social democrats are helping them by whipping up a nationalist campaign against Chinese territorial claims in the contested waters, while failing to oppose the growing U.S. military occupation of the Philippines.

Today, the socialist left is largely confined to petty-bourgeois circles—discredited in the eyes of the masses or considered unwitting tools of the government. With U.S. imperialism ramping up the plunder of its neocolony, there is an urgent need to reorient the Philippine left. This requires a complete political break with the bourgeois liberals, the ejection of the pro-U.S. conciliators from within the workers movement and the fight for communists to lead the nation in revolutionary struggle against imperialist tyranny.

* * *

APRIL—Trump is turning the screws on the Philippines while the masses stand disarmed and divided. Some are tied to Marcos and Wall Street through their leadership's support to the liberal anti-Duterte opposition. Others are looking to the Dutertistas as the only force standing up to imperialist oppression. These divisions will only lead to disaster! To defend the Philippines against the Trump administration, we need to join together in a solid anti-imperialist front.

Ezra Acayan/Getty

Former president Rodrigo Duterte's "War on Drugs" took the lives of tens of thousands of Filipinos.

The Dutertistas' hints about assassinations and coups portend nothing good. They are testing the waters, wondering if there is an opening to bring down the BBM regime and regiment the masses by crushing our democratic rights and unleashing brutal state repression. The BBM regime is confident it will be able to put down the Dutertista opposition because it has the backing of the Trump administration and the pro-American officer corps. But BBM is fueling the rise of Dutertismo by prostrating the country before the imperialists. The left is unable to stop the Dutertes' rise because it is tied to BBM and the imperialists.

To break the hold of Dutertismo over the masses, the workers movement must reclaim the banner of anti-imperialism and take the lead in the struggle to liberate the nation. Defense of the victims of Dutertista terror must be fused together with a program to improve the conditions of the workers and the petty bourgeoisie at the expense of the imperialists. This requires taking up the fight ***to cancel the imperialist debt*** which is crushing the people, ***opposing the U.S.'s military encirclement of China*** and the use of the country as a barracks to defend the interests of American finance capital, and ***raising the banner of national liberation*** to rally the Southeast Asian masses being driven to the edge as the imperialist vice tightens on the region. Obviously none of this can be done while the left is tied to the liberals, the Marcos government and the imperialists.

Eloisa Lopez/Reuters

National Democrats demand that the Philippines rejoin the imperialist-controlled International Criminal Court. This only further discredits the left.

As things stand now, no one is challenging the pro-imperialists liberals' claims to speak for the victims of the Dutertes, for democracy and against police and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) terror. Those looking to the liberals will have their hopes cruelly dashed. Corruption, brutality, the limited character of democratic rights and the dictatorial character of the regime—all these social scourges result from the poverty and backwardness of Philippine society, which is caused by imperialist enslavement. It is not possible to fight any of these things in an alliance with the U.S.'s liberal lapdogs or the Marcos regime. Moreover, the opponents of Dutertismo will be isolated and have society turned against them as long as they are associated with the supporters of imperialism. The struggle for justice and democracy can only succeed if it is waged on an anti-imperialist basis that attracts the masses behind it and addresses the real source of the problem.

Akbayan and Makabayan are campaigning for Congress to convict Sara Duterte. But what about the president? They aren't calling for the impeachment of that equally corrupt oligarch, the man in charge who is selling the country out to the imperialists and disappearing activists in the countryside (and moreover was almost banned from running in the last election for failing to pay taxes on his family's ill-gotten wealth). No: they're pleading with Marcos to take a firm stand against corruption and crack down on his competition. As a strategy to defeat the Duterte right-wing reactionaries, this is totally self-defeating. It only associates the movement more closely with the Marcos government. This backhanded support to the U.S.'s neoliberal henchmen in Malacañang [president's office and residence] is exactly the reason why the masses believe that the right-wing populists are the only serious opponents of the existing status quo.

Marcos distanced himself from the calls for Sara's impeachment, calling it a distraction from the real business of government—but his son was the first to sign the House impeachment order and the vote was pushed through by his allies in Congress. Both BBM and the liberal anti-Duterte opposition benefit from Marcos's hypocrisy on this question. By letting Akbayan, Makabayan and the liberals spearhead the drive against the Dutertes, Marcos can appear respectable and put some distance between himself and the prosecution of his main political rival. And the liberals and the left can pretend that their high-minded struggle against corruption and state violence isn't serving as a tool of BBM and his imperialist masters. This pretense won't fool the masses—to rally them we must take a stand against ***all*** the political dynasties, from the Dutertes to the Marcoses to the Aquinos!

The Filipino people have had enough of being taxed to death by corrupt politicians. Socialists do have an interest in Sara's impeachment—but not just Sara's. Real and effective measures are needed against all the politicians who swindle the people, but the real drain on the country's wealth is not the trapos [corrupt politicians] lining their pockets. It's the imperialists draining the country. The political dynasties have grown rich by helping the imperialists plunder the nation. Obviously, they can't be trusted to combat this plague. They must be forced to open the nation's books to the people, so everyone knows how much of the nation's wealth is going into dodgy deals to attract imperialist investors, what land and resources are being used to enrich foreign finance capital at the expense of the development of the nation, who is taking bribes from the imperialists. If the political dynasties refuse, their assets should be seized and used to benefit the people!

The liberals in Congress will only take the most tepid and ineffective measures against corruption, because any real steps require a confrontation with the imperialists. And Makabayan isn't taking any real steps either, because to do so will alienate their liberal colleagues in Congress. ***You can't paddle your bangka in two rivers at the same time! Either you support the imperialists' liberal lackeys or you serve the masses: you have to choose which side you're on!***

Duterte's war on drugs killed untold thousands. The victims' families and comrades burn for justice. Many leftists argue we can never get justice in the Philippines. When the Marcos administration executed the ICC warrant, arresting Rodrigo Duterte

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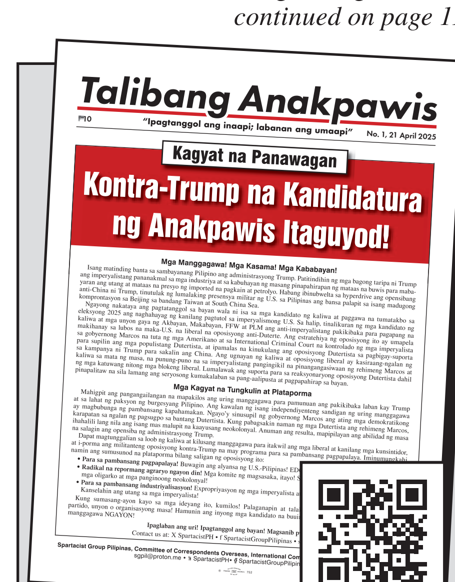
Talibang Anakpawis

₱10 "Ipagtanggol ang inaapi; labanan ang umaapi" No. 1, 21 April 2025

Kagyat na Panawagan

Kontra-Trump na Kandidatura ng Anakpawis Itaguyod!

Mga Manggagawa! Mga Kasama! Mga Kababayan!

Mga Kagyat na Tungkulin at Plataporma

Ipaglaban ang uri! Ipagtanggol ang bayan!

Spartacist Group Pilipinas, Committee of Correspondents Overseas, International Com…

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Labor...

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erupted, from auto to aerospace. These strikes could have won and changed the game for the working class, but the union misleaders held them back in order to avoid causing too much trouble for the liberal Democrats.

This cost the working class a lot and led to worsening working and living conditions for many of us. Because of this, a large section of the working class shifted to the right and voted for Trump after four years of economic ruin, massive homelessness and deepened racial divisions under Biden. The Trump voters included many black and Hispanic workers. They hate the hypocrisy of Democratic Party liberals, who told them to feel bad for other oppressed groups while food was taken out of their mouths and money out of their pockets. It's no wonder that many chose Trump hoping for some sort of economic relief. While some of our working-class brothers and sisters are experiencing "buyer's remorse," many more still back Trump. This isn't because they're deplorable people, but because the Republicans have succeeded in convincing them that immigrants and other oppressed people are the source of their misery, not the bosses.

We Have to Pick Our Shots

The bureaucracies' betrayals, weakened unions and lack of a real fightback against Trump's attacks have many workers feeling hopeless and keeping their heads down with the aim of just clocking in and out. Of course, this has worked out perfectly for the bosses, who continue to bleed us dry and push divisions in the working class. And these divisions will only get worse as our economic position continues to deteriorate.

The main point of this conference is to help those fighting in the unions and the workplace to understand why the working class is in the state it is in and how to deal with the day-to-day issues on the job, knowing that we will not win over the working masses in their current state. That does not mean giving up the fight. No, we still have a job to do. It's just that the fight looks different. It's fighting from a position of defense when a majority of the class does not want to stick its neck out. Protecting the small gains that we have now is necessary to lessen the damage from any attacks by the bosses and the Trump administration.

Many of our coworkers are scared and refuse to engage in political discussion. What I hear at work is: "It's always been like this and will always be like this." And what I see is more and more of the individualistic mentality of "let me take care of me and my own." We working-class fighters tend to react to this by pushing for some collective action at work. We see the divisions playing out every day and try to unite our coworkers to fight the bosses.

But recently, many of us have been met with a wall of apathy. And then we try to push harder against that wall, only to make no dent and burn ourselves out. The working class is in a horrible situation, unable to go on the offensive and facing great obstacles to even maintaining what it has now. We must understand this because the last thing we need is for militant workers to fight so hard without results that they become further isolated and frustrated and walk away from the class struggle.

I'd like to give an example of pushing for action that at this point would not be effective. Just recently, I wanted to call for immigrant defense committees at my unionized workplace that would mobilize to get ICE to back down in the event of a raid. Obviously, such action is needed and would be far different from the bureaucrats' usual do-nothing "know your rights" campaigns. But that alone does not mean it was advisable to charge forward.

To give some background, my union is majority black and Hispanic. Many of these workers are either immigrants or come from an immigrant background, just like me. Almost every day, my coworkers talk about the ICE raids, and the dominant feelings are disbelief and fear. But I also have a couple of coworkers whose reaction is "we got to get these agents." These workers are looking to a drastic alternative because of the lack of much-needed working-class intervention. If anything, workers who are in fear and workers who want "to get these agents" are two sides of the same coin of despair.

The aim of forming this committee was to bring courage to those who are afraid and channel the anger of the others so that they wouldn't do something stupid. At the same time, it was supposed to put the union leadership—which claims to be fighters for the oppressed—on the spot. That seems like a pretty just and righteous action, right? But the question isn't if something is just and righteous.

But what does "preparing ourselves and our closest coworkers" mean? The exact answers will be different across different industries. One way to start preparing is by pushing back against the individualistic attitude that is dominant in the class right now. You can do this by explaining how it's only through the working class coming together as a collective force that we have a better chance of surviving the next round of brutal attacks. It may seem like a small task, but at this point it's a profound thing to argue. And it can push consciousness forward.

The next point I want to make is to guard against looking inward when we don't get the results we were hoping for. At work, I have been trying to expose how the union leadership holds us back by tying us to the bosses and the Democrats. This is all in an effort to break up the cliques that

WV Photo

NYC, June 17: Militant transit worker addresses rally in defense of pro-Palestinian, trade-union and anti-colonial activists facing French state repression.

The question is: Where are my coworkers' heads at right now? As I said, they did not want to draw unnecessary attention. In this case, calling for committees that required a confrontation with not only ICE but also the bosses and the union bureaucracy would've pushed the fearful elements away from me, further frustrating the angry coworkers.

That doesn't mean we don't look to set up immigrant defense committees at all; we just need to be clear as to when it's the right time to call for them. And there will be openings, especially when there's a raid in my workplace or a similar one in my part of the country. But this hasn't yet happened, unlike on the West Coast. Once that changes, there's more of a chance that workers will want to do something, especially when they feel that something like an ICE raid directly impacts their lives or the lives of people they know. The point is, we want to be around and not burned out when there are opportunities to push forward collective working-class defense.

Patience Is a Must

We have to be straight up about what's going on. The working class has been beaten down with the help of the trade-union leaders and is paralyzed in the face of growing right-wing reaction. Because of this, we cannot and will not change the current situation with the few fighters we have in the unions. In my case, I cannot and will not be able to protect all my coworkers. Thinking that one person can take on such a task will lead to demoralization. It's a hard pill to swallow, believe me, because as working-class fighters we want not only to fight for workers, but to protect them too. But the quicker we accept what we have to work with, the quicker we can work with it. What we must do as class-conscious workers is brace for the oncoming attacks by taking a step back and preparing ourselves and our closest coworkers for what's to come. And it's not some kind of betrayal to do this. In fact, it is absolutely necessary to take a step back and preserve ourselves in order to be alive and politically relevant when the situation changes in the working class's favor.

the bureaucrats have consolidated over the years and win my coworkers to the perspective that we have the power to change the situation in our industry. While I have a base of support that knows I am fighting to strengthen the union, nobody else will stick out their neck. Other coworkers steer clear of me because they are in cliques with the union reps or do not want to engage in politics at all.

Those of us fighting in the workplace have been disappointed and have sometimes despaired at not getting or losing the hearing of our coworkers. The result has been workers blaming themselves and thinking they either didn't fight hard enough or didn't make the right arguments. I find myself doing this all the time, thinking that "I'm not doing what I'm supposed to be doing." This inward-looking approach will only lead to exhaustion and demoralization. It needs to be understood that the current setup has been around for decades. You will not disrupt this setup overnight, especially when the class has moved to the right. We are limited in what we can do. It takes patience to build up a profile among our coworkers as serious and level-headed fighters who look for opportunities to push forward collective working-class defense while being conscious of the obstacles the class faces.

Examples of Defensive Struggle

I'll give a couple of examples where our friends were able to establish a name for themselves. In West Coast longshore, our supporter was able to put the Committee to End Tier Segregation in the ILWU on the map by taking up a successful fight against the ILWU Local 10 bureaucracy's repeated attempts to impose new job dispatch rules. The new rules would have amounted to a new tier in the already tier-divided workforce. Dozens of coworkers, including many who would have been impacted by the new tier, signed up for the committee—but still do not agree fully with its purpose: to put an end to segregation by tiers in the union. The tier setup heavily mirrors racial segregation in society. Our work is long-term, even in victory. Patience is key.

Another small but important fight is being waged by a friend who is a white worker in a union, which like others, is racially segregated. Many black workers across the country are skeptical of the possibility of white workers ever fighting on their behalf. This is a consequence of the bosses keeping black workers on the bottom and of the refusal of the union leadership to do anything meaningful about it. So, our friend showed by example that white workers can and do fight for black and all other coworkers, and in the process he gave them a sense of the value of the union. He filed a grievance against the bosses' violation of the contract and pursued it in a way that could benefit workers of both races.

He did so despite the initial opposition of the union bureaucracy, and his persistence forced the bureaucrats to defend the membership in this case. This doesn't mean that our friend has sealed up the racial divisions that plague the union, but it's a small start. The only way to bridge the gulf between what is and what is necessary, is to look for any opportunity to try to bridge racial divisions and convince other white workers that a struggle for racial equality will improve everyone's conditions.

Another crucial way to prepare for what's to come is to read. That may seem simple enough, but reading about past struggles of the workers movement, nationally and internationally, is important to political development. Reading arms workers and improves their ability to deal with their immediate situation at work, including by learning from the mistakes of the movement and hopefully how to not repeat them. Reading James P. Cannon and Leon Trotsky on the trade unions can only help root us in our historic task and solidify us as working-class fighters.

The period that we're in is both reactionary and unstable. And as far as we can see, it will get worse before it gets better. Although this may sound pessimistic, there's no reason to be hopeless or to despair. It's a time of careful retreat, preparing and arming ourselves and our coworkers, so that we can brace for the coming attacks and fight when it's time. This is our task right now and the main way to organize the most conscious elements at this point. We need to be honest about which fights we can wage, keeping in mind that we will not win every battle. This isn't because there's a lack of will to fight back among working-class militants, but because the political position of the entire working class has been degraded so much that workers are apathetic even about issues tied directly to their immediate conditions.

I can offer some optimism right now. Constant reaction will be met with struggle, and there is tremendous power in the American working class. The question is: Will there be people there who will guide the working class when they finally say: "Enough is enough"? Elements of that leadership are here today in this room, and we should be looking to form a nucleus—a small core of workers—to provide leadership when the working class does move.■

ICL on
Labor
iclfi.org/t/en/labor

Report-back from Workers Conference

"What should we do now?": This was the question on the minds of dozens of workers who gathered at this summer's Workers Conference sponsored by the Spartacist League/U.S. Participants hailed from across the country and had varying relations to the party, although most were members of SL-supported union committees. Others came from Mexico, Canada, Britain and Germany, bringing with them their experiences as union reps and activists during this increasingly reactionary period a half year into Trump's second presidency.

The purpose of the conference was to provide analysis and direction at a time when many workers feel "slammed against a wall" and efforts by militants to push struggles forward have largely stalled. The gathering sought to help participants keep their heads above water, prepare coworkers for attacks ahead and be in a position to organize defensive struggles when opportunities arise. Even modest defensive actions—like the campaign to reinstate Train Operator Andy Valentine in New York City Transit (see back page)—can provide a sense of collectivity and give impetus to the forging of a new union leadership that will fight for workers' interests. When a proposal to do something gets no takers, it is not a betrayal but necessary self-preservation to take a step back and regroup.

Among the many conversations, one New York City hospital worker swapped stories with a construction worker from the mainly white rural Midwest. She observed that they come from "opposite ends of the American nightmare" in which workers of all races face "poverty everywhere" but are extremely polarized along reactionary lines like Democrat vs. Republican. The construction worker recalled he would "go on agitation binges" to organize some job action and "get nothing in return." "I need to be patient and keep reaching out with the party," he later said. "I need to be careful and pick opportunities" to draw workers together in action by building on anger shared across the partisan divide against the abuses of foremen and contractors.

Combating the divisions—by race, ethnicity, tier, craft, gender and more—whipped up by the bosses and reinforced by the bureaucrats is crucial to transforming the unions into active defense organizations, especially in the current climate. In this light, the escalating ICE anti-immigrant crackdown—which finds support among many U.S.-born workers—was discussed at the conference. Compounding the problem, the union tops have told the rank and file to fully comply with masked gunmen looking to board buses or storm workplaces. As another construction worker pointed out, they "think that complacency is survival, but really it is a death sentence" for labor. "It is tying us to our class enemies."

If workers are not ready to resist ICE, militants can encourage their confidence in the power of collective action by initiating struggles against immediately felt attacks by the bosses, while finding ways to get across that immigrant defense is a defense of ***all*** workers. As a union militant from the South put it, take "a small opportunity to flex a muscle, try to take a small win if you can. You can't lift a heavy thing if you haven't learned how to flex a muscle." Enforcement of safety standards is one possible lever to counter the bureaucrats' orders to aid ICE. For example, in NYC, train operators are allowed to bypass a station if there is a clear danger or police activity on the platform. Similarly, as one transit worker explained, "A bus driver is like the captain of a ship" with a duty to keep their passengers safe.

Participants also discussed liberal vs. class-struggle responses to racism. The liberals blame white workers for black oppression and appeal to the bosses' government for redress—the very enforcers of racial segregation. This only weakens the union and turns white workers into Trumpers. Class-struggle militants attempt to mobilize white workers to fight against the mechanisms that keep black workers on the bottom in a way that benefits everyone. They explain how attacks on black people today, if left unchallenged, will embolden the class enemy to attack ***all*** workers tomorrow. They respond immediately to any racist provocation on the job.

One of several workshops addressed running for union posts. Union elections provide an arena for militants to gauge the receptivity of their coworkers to a serious effort to strengthen the union—and the potential to gain a position to better pursue this perspective in practice. But that requires the candidate to present a platform combining immediate measures with broader ones—that is, a platform that intersects felt needs in order to orient workers in a direction that can actually satisfy them. Any such game plan to improve the fighting capacity of the union—by bridging divisions, forging links with other layers of the class and putting the union on its own two feet against the bosses—will not sit well with the bureaucracy.

In the current period, the pressure will be to go narrow and confine oneself entirely to shop floor issues. This pressure must be consciously resisted (as well as the knee-jerk response of simply waving the red flag to no good effect). A member of the Committee to End Tier Segregation in the ILWU stressed that militants should put forward a platform based on working-class independence or perhaps not run if they cannot openly draw a line against the pro-capitalist leadership.

Other lessons discussed at the conference include:

Fight for union solidarity against individualism. Due to the union tops' betrayals, militant workers must reestablish basic principles that workers once took for granted and win them to a broader perspective. Never snitch to the bosses. Defend workers from victimization. Never meet with management unless a union rep is present. Picket lines mean don't cross. Bring new hires and apprentices into the union on Day One. Organize the unorganized, regardless of immigration status. End segregation by race, tier and craft. Equal pay for equal work. Never bring the government into a dispute within the union.

Build your authority. Never be a burden to your coworkers, work safely and be punctual. Share your knowledge with and listen closely to other workers. This will earn their respect, making it more difficult for the bosses to frame you up and more likely that coworkers will defend you when you are targeted.

Learn survival skills. Be wary of launching major battles against the bosses and union bureaucrats unless workers are behind you. Seek out another front that workers are willing to fight on, and provide guidance for that struggle as a first step toward preparing workers for larger battles. Study your contract, the union constitution and Roberts Rules of Order. Get them translated into Spanish and/or other languages so that your coworkers can determine the most effective angle of defense in any given situation.

Demonstrate how support to U.S. imperialism weakens American labor. Few workers will be inclined to take action against the ravages of the U.S. rulers abroad unless they see how doing so benefits themselves. *WV* made a very concrete case when it proved how the ILA leaders' support to U.S. imperialism sabotaged union struggle—namely their pledge to keep loading military cargo during the union's October 2024 strike.

A few months ago, Columbia University fired the grad student union president, who is also a pro-Palestinian activist. The attacks on opponents of the genocide in Gaza have gone hand in hand with assaults on the campus unions and education cuts. This suppression of dissent and union-busting will spread like wildfire to other sectors of the labor movement if not fought.

Educate yourself. You can't lead workers to victory if you don't learn from the revolutionaries who came before you. With this in mind, the conference was preceded by an open house at the Prometheus Research Library, where the assembled militants were encouraged to utilize the PRL as a vital resource. (For a catalog of its holdings, see prl.org.) One factory worker was inspired to read *ABC of Communism* after the conference. He described his surprise at how this century-old book describes so precisely the *jodidez* that the workers face today, "It's like time froze."

The event was a learning experience for the party as much as for the workers. As one education worker pointed out, the event addressed the "need for union militants to keep the party grounded in reality"—so that it can effectively present a revolutionary program in words and deeds—and how "the party comrades keep the workers rooted in the goals so they don't get sucked up by day-to-day minutiae." American Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon's advice to a Workers Party coal miners conference in 1924 remains true today:

> "Our revolutionary goal shapes our policy in the daily struggle.… Woe to us if we become so 'practical' as to forget this for one moment. All our work must lead toward the proletarian revolution. If we keep this always in mind and measure all our daily work by this standard we will keep on the right road."
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> —"Our Aims and Tactics in the Trade Unions," 27 July 1924, reprinted in *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism* (New York: Prometheus Research Library, 1992)■

Greetings

Please extend revolutionary internationalist greetings to the conference from comrades in Southeast Asia, who recognize that the "special relationship" between the United States and the Philippines should be one of anti-imperialist alliance between the North American working class and the Philippine toiling masses. Every concrete push back against the bosses, no matter how small, is a blow that weakens the chains of oppression and prepares the ground for forward leaps in the struggle of the workers of the world.

Sulong! Makibaka! Huwag matakot!
Forward! Struggle! Be Brave!

—Spartakistang Grupo Pilipinas
(Komite ng mga Korespondente sa Ultramar)
Spartacist Group Pilipinas,
Committee of Correspondents Overseas

Justice for Saniyah Cheatham!

OPA/NYC

On July 5, Saniyah Cheatham was found dead in her jail cell. The cops claim that she killed herself. Everyone knows this is bullshit. Remember Sandra Bland, who also "committed suicide" in jail. And on August 8, Deborah McCalla Terrell, a 68-year-old grandmother in New Brunswick, New Jersey, was executed by the cops in the hallway of her senior citizen home. This racist cop terror against black women is intolerable, and something must be done ***now***.

Open Police Archives (OPA) activists joined an August 6 protest at the Bronx's 41st Precinct where Saniyah was found dead. The protest demanded release of the autopsy report, surveillance and body-cam video and the log and names of cops on duty. The disgusting crimes of the capitalists' guard dogs must be exposed to all.

The struggle against cop terror desperately needs to be rebuilt—rebuilt in complete opposition to "progressive" politicians who have ditched even tepid talk against the cops and gone on to lick their boots. Allying with these traitors has only led the movement to defeat. ***Open the 41st Precinct police archives! Justice for every black woman murdered by the capitalist state!***

Immigrant, Latino, Black LA

Liberals Paved the Way for Reaction

Robert Gauthier/Los Angeles Times

Luis Sinco/Los Angeles Times

Liberal multiracial coalitions built by L.A. mayors from Bradley (right, back) to Villaraigosa (above, center) to Bass (above, right) have only screwed over black, brown and working-class L.A.

Doug Pizac/AP

The following is a document submitted this February by Spartacist League/U.S. Central Committee member Lital Singer for discussion at a CC plenum. It has been edited for publication.

The purpose of this document is to show how the SL/U.S.'s political disorientation—beginning in the 1980s and worsening throughout the post-Soviet period—paralyzed our Los Angeles local and why the political lessons are relevant to today. It will address the obstacles to organizing and uniting the city's multiracial working class at that time and what the tasks of Marxists were as against what the SL argued. It will also consider how these obstacles are posed in the present—and how to overcome them.

Deindustrialization and the Winds of Change

U.S. imperialism went through an extended crisis in the late 1960s and '70s. Its defeat in Vietnam was a real turning point, opening up a period of economic and political turmoil at home and abroad. L.A. was a hotbed of black radicalism. Much of the Black Panther leadership had roots in L.A., where they organized after the 1965 Watts uprising and also influenced the Chicano militancy of the late '60s.

However, the revolutionary openings of this period all ended in defeat. In L.A., the destruction of the Black Panthers, in part through murderous government repression, resulted in a vacuum that was filled by lumpen street gangs, whose activity escalated throughout the '80s. By then, U.S. imperialism was back on the offensive, marking the start of the neoliberal era of privatization, economic liberalization and high immigration.

Los Angeles, the second-largest city in the U.S., was transformed as a result. Deindustrialization happened early on. Starting in the '70s, a number of industries were hollowed out and replaced with service and tech jobs and an expanding entertainment industry, i.e., Hollywood. The city's black population was devastated amid a huge demographic shift fueled by immigration of mostly Mexicans, but also Central Americans, as U.S. domination and subjugation of their homelands intensified.

In the 1980s, Reaganism reigned supreme. The U.S. ruling class coupled aggressive anti-communism with a conscious policy of offshoring, both to destroy trade unions and get around the cost of modernizing U.S. industry in favor of buying cheap products from abroad. Over the first half of the decade, employment increased nationwide, but the nature of the available jobs was changing. According to William Lazonick in "The Financialization of the U.S. Corporation" (*Seattle U. L. Review*, 2013): "Employment of operators, fabricators, and laborers fell from 20 million to 16.8 million, a decline of 15.9%."

In 1981, early in his presidency, Reagan dealt a decisive defeat to the U.S. working class by crushing the PATCO air traffic controllers strike. This was followed by years of plant closures, which wiped out decent-paying union jobs in L.A. and beyond. A 1991 *Los Angeles Times* article on the area's auto manufacturing facilities noted that:

> "Once upon a time, in the 1940s, '50s and '60s, they cut an imposing swath through the heart of Los Angeles County. There was the Chrysler plant in the City of Commerce, the Ford plant in Pico Rivera, the General Motors plants in South Gate and Van Nuys, the Studebaker plant in Vernon, the Nash plant in El Segundo, the Willys-Overland plant in Maywood. When GM announced the closure of its Van Nuys plant Friday, it snuffed out the last glimpse of an era in which 15,000 or more Los Angeles auto workers put together half a million cars in a single year…".

L.A. County had been the second-largest automaking center in the nation, behind Detroit. By 1971, when the Chrysler plant shut down, imported cars already accounted for 41 percent of all sales in the city. Other industrial jobs were also decimated. Many of these jobs went overseas or to cheaper, non-union regions in the South and Southwest.

AP

11 December 1969: Thousands-strong Black Panther protest in downtown L.A., in response to a police raid on BPP L.A. headquarters.

The Devastation of Black L.A.

It was the presence of industrial jobs that impelled many black people to migrate to L.A. (largely from Louisiana and Texas). The city's black population surged during WWII and postwar and by 1970 had reached almost half a million, the largest in California. Although segregated, black people made up a key component of the working class.

Because the vast majority of the city was off-limits to black people, as it was to Latinos, black neighborhoods sprang up in proximity to the old barrios. This was both the seed of competition for scarce resources and the start of cultural exchange. In 1964, California passed Proposition 14, which enshrined the ability of homeowners to deny sales based on race. At this point, Latinos were a similarly sized demographic, albeit older than the black population. Some Latino groups organized against Prop 14 on the basis that this was their fight too—like black people, they wanted equality in education and housing. But other Latinos who had progressed toward assimilation viewed anti-black racism as not their problem. While overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1967, Prop 14 codified the practice in L.A. before and since, whether legally sanctioned or not.

L.A. schools were also segregated. In parts of South L.A. that were then overwhelmingly white and working class, like South Gate, the schools were almost 100 percent white. Black youth who lived near South Gate had to attend schools farther away that were 99 percent black. In 1976, the California Supreme Court ruled that L.A. had to integrate its schools. For three years, busing was implemented. The loudest voices against this were white parents in the San Fernando Valley who did not want their kids bused. But Latinos were also mobilized against busing in the name of defense of bilingual education. While Latinos did not have that much voting weight at the time, they were cynically used to claim that white liberals weren't racist.

In 1979, the passage of California Prop 1 overturned busing. I grew up in L.A. in the '80s, at which point the city's public schools were 18 percent white. (Today, it's only 10 percent.) Most of those white kids were in better-funded magnet programs that had racial quotas. The high school I went to had two magnet programs, which were integrated but had only a few hundred students. The rest of the school consisted of the "original" school attended by 2,000 students, almost all Latino and black and some Filipinos as well. Today, the L.A. school district is 74 percent Latino, and many kids go to schools with an almost 100 percent Latino student body.

In the 1970s, manufacturing was the top employer of black workers in L.A. Many belonged to unions and earned decent wages. Janitorial and hotel work were mostly black union jobs, as was the postal service. Deindustrialization forced most black workers who stayed in L.A. to take low-wage service jobs. They then had to compete for these jobs with the rapidly

increasing Latino immigrant population. All this has ramifications today: Black people are 8 percent of city residents, yet make up 42 percent of the homeless. In California, 28 percent of male prisoners are black, even though only 6 percent of the state's adult male population is black.

By the 1980s, the historic core of working-class black L.A.—South Central and Compton—was changing. Immigrant groups, mostly from Mexico and Central America, were moving in, mainly because the traditional Latino areas were overflowing and they couldn't move into the white areas. At the same time, a lot of black people who could do so left the city. The decimation of jobs, together with Reagan's austerity measures and racist "war on crime," brought intensified ghettoization and an increase in gangs, drugs and racist police terror and occupation. Police helicopters were called "ghetto birds" because they frequently circled overhead.

This is the golden age of gangster rap like Eazy E and N.W.A., reflecting the worsening state of black L.A. It was also the beginning of mass incarceration, which vastly accelerated under Clinton's 1994 crime bill. The 1992 L.A. upheaval following the acquittal of the cops who beat Rodney King was an outpouring against not just rampant police brutality in the ghettos—then half Latino and half black, but also the wretched living conditions and job prospects that went back to deindustrialization.

L.A.'s Latino residents numbered 422,000 in 1970, around 820,000 in 1980 and 1.4 million in 1990. By 2020, almost two million Latinos resided in the city. In comparison, the slightly larger black population of 490,000 in 1970 barely ticked up to 500,000 a decade later. By 2020, that figure had dropped to 335,000. The white population was always the majority in L.A. until the '90s (2.1 million in 1970, 1.8 million in 1980 and 1.3 million in 2020). Today, there is also a sizable Asian population which is 12 percent of the total. The city's white working-class areas are long gone, since white workers moved outside the city to find work and more affordable housing.

Denying a Changing Reality

Our party didn't have any supporters in the L.A. auto plants when the industry was uprooted in the 1980s, but we did fight in Fremont (GM's Bay Area facility) and Detroit against plant closings. Our propaganda was pretty good, and the UAW Militant Caucus worked tirelessly to stop the layoffs and keep Fremont open. But after the SL-supported caucuses disbanded, we stopped raising a program for the working class and oppressed to fight the devastation.

We couldn't deal with the major developments of this contradictory period, as Cold War reaction combined with ascendant neoliberalism. We defended the Soviet Union and fought imperialism abroad and at home—which came down hard on black people and immigrants at key points. We obviously knew there was a large increase in immigration. But our reaction was to cling to liberal moralism as opposed to basing ourselves on a Marxist understanding of the objective reality and the tasks flowing from it.

Mike Sergieff/Herald Examiner/Los Angeles Public Library

Racist 1981 protest against busing black students to integrate junior high school in L.A.'s San Fernando Valley. Liberal integration efforts were defeated, and L.A. is still as segregated as ever.

Despite the growth of the Latino population, we denied that a lasting demographic change was underway and projected both mass deportations and the mass assimilation of Latinos along racial lines. It was as if factoring the increasing weight of the Latino working class into our tasks would negate the centrality of the fight for black liberation to the American revolution. In fact, the opposite is true: To liberate Latinos from their exploitation and oppression necessitates fighting against black oppression, the key tool used by the capitalists to weaken and divide the proletariat. The history of working-class struggle in L.A. has made this very clear.

The refusal to take account of a changing reality led to many cannibalistic and moralist internal fights in L.A. and left many comrades unmoored. *Spartacist* No. 68 (September 2023) states that a party that claims to be Marxist but does not have a correct political and economic appreciation of the period cannot guide the working class in line with its class interests. Lacking a materialist grounding, this party will set tasks for itself, and for the proletariat, that necessarily reflect the interests of other classes. This helps explain why the different fights in L.A. over the black question, Latinos and immigrants have been mired in liberalism.

Liberalism on Immigration and the Black Question

In our seminal article "Hispanics, Refugees Targeted—Labor: Smash Racist Immigration Law!" (*WV* No. 427, 1 May 1987), we recognize "the growing importance of Hispanics in the United States, and the implications for revolutionaries." But we then go on to quote our 1983 national conference document:

> "As they are absorbed, Hispanics will tend to become assimilated mainly to whites…as with every new wave of immigrants, the first wave often faces brutal conditions—in this case, particularly the superexploitation growing out of undocumented workers' lack of legal rights."

This is not what happened. Whatever the similarities among the "first waves," Mexican and Central American immigrants' overall experiences have differed from those of pre-1920 Italian and Irish immigrants for a reason: their home countries are in the backyard of and oppressed by racist U.S. imperialism. Another key factor is the difference in the period. Prior to 1920, U.S. imperialism was on the rise, and its industrial base was growing. By the 1970s and '80s, U.S. imperialism was in decline, and there was not much of a ladder to climb.

There have been continuous waves of Latino immigration for decades in an extended period of relative stability. It is common for earlier generations to oppose the next wave, which the bourgeoisie uses as scab labor and to undercut their organizing. Being undocumented in huge numbers—something never faced by European immigrants—also impacts Latino prospects for assimilation. In L.A., while there are a number of Latinos who have "made it," the vast majority have not. They are segregated in the worst schools and neighborhoods at a time when conditions have been worsening for the working class as a whole. Additionally, Latinos are 80 percent working-class and most don't get out of the class they are born into, partly due to discrimination.

The answer to the question of how to fight the oppression of Latinos is not so different from that of how to fight black oppression: We must fight for multiracial unity based on shared material interests against the bosses who pit one group against the other in a race to the bottom. It's not in the interests of white workers to have a layer of black workers below them, bringing down everyone's wages. This is also true of the relationship between U.S.-born workers and undocumented immigrants. For example, in the 1980s when unionized black janitors were being laid off and replaced by non-union immigrant labor at dramatically reduced pay, there needed to be a citywide janitors strike to defend black workers' livelihoods and organize immigrants into the union at the same pay. As we would often say, the struggles go forward together or fall back separately. But to my knowledge, no one put forward a program to fight along these lines.

Instead, we approached the divisions between immigrants and black people by arguing that they had to overcome their mutual prejudices—a liberal approach. American Trotskyist Richard Fraser captured the heart of white liberalism:

> "When applied to the Negro question, the theory of morality means that the root of the problem of discrimination and white supremacy is prejudice. This is the reigning theory of American liberalism and is the means by which the capitalists throw the responsibility for the Jim Crow system upon the population as a whole. If people weren't prejudiced there would be no Negro problem. This contention is fundamentally false."
>
> —"In Memoriam—Richard S. Fraser: An Appreciation and Selection of His Work," *Prometheus Research Series* No. 3, August 1990

A liberal argument used to push the "melting pot" American Dream lie is that, unlike black people, Latino immigrants work hard and will do jobs lazy black people won't do. This is an argument for superexploitation of immigrant labor.

The Neoliberals Feast on the Undocumented

The American bourgeoisie saw superexploitation of immigrants as a linchpin of the neoliberal order that was emerging in the 1970s. The door to the mass influx of immigrants was opened by the 1965 immigration bill, which came out of the civil rights movement and got rid of racist quotas that were in place since the 1920s. Importantly, though, the neoliberals wanted mass ***undocumented*** immigration. Milton Friedman—one of the fathers of neoliberalism and a crafter of imperialist "shock therapy" in Latin America—gave the neoliberal argument in a 1978 lecture, "What is America?":

> "Look, for example, at the obvious, immediate, practical case of illegal Mexican immigration. That Mexican immigration, over the border, is a good thing. It's a good thing for the illegal immigrants, it's a good thing for the United States, it's a good thing for the citizens of the country, but it's only good so long as it's illegal.… Why? Because as long as it's illegal the people who come in do not qualify for welfare, they don't qualify for social security, they don't qualify for all the other myriads of benefits that we pour out from our left pocket into our right pocket, and so, as long as they don't qualify, they migrate to jobs. They take jobs that most residents of this country are unwilling to take. They provide employers with workers of a kind they cannot get."

Today, this is the main argument liberals use against Trump: You can't deport all the immigrants, who will do these jobs? But such neoliberal notions have fallen out of fashion within the ruling class. Right before the election, JD Vance was asked by a liberal *New York Times* reporter: "So how do you propose to build all the housing necessary that we need in this country by removing all the people who are working in construction?" Vance responded: "You absolutely could re-engage folks into the American labor market.… People say, well, Americans won't do those jobs. Americans won't do those jobs for below-the-table wages. They won't do those jobs for non-living wages, but people will do those jobs…at certain wages." This is an effective argument that appeals to native-born workers even though it's a lie that Vance and Trump are going to create high-paying

Kirk McCoy/Los Angeles Times

29 April 1992: Cops attack protesters during L.A. upheaval after acquittal of the cops who beat Rodney King.

Mike Sergieff/Herald Examiner/Los Angles Public Library

UAW protest against threatened closing of General Motors plant in Van Nuys, California, 1983.

David McNew/Hulton

Nick Ut/AP

Left: Latino SEIU janitors vote overwhelmingly to strike, rejecting bosses' paltry 18-cent pay raise, April 2000. Right: Over one million demonstrate for immigrant rights, May Day 2006. Aspirations of the Latino masses to improve their conditions have been held back by liberal leadership.

construction jobs. Instilling constant fear in a layer of workers only undermines the ability of the working class as a whole to fight the bosses' attacks.

In neoliberalism's heyday, we projected that Reagan was going to carry out mass deportations. In response to his 1986 immigration bill, which contained various nasty provisions, our press declared: "But this is just preparation for the avalanche of up to ***two million*** deportations the new law is expected to touch off" (*WV* No. 427, 1 May 1987). But as far as I could tell, there were no mass deportations that year. Today, the bill is remembered for having granted amnesty to three million Latinos, the last time that has happened in the U.S. To qualify, immigrants had to prove they came in before 1982. At the same time, the militarization of the border began. Previously, immigrants had gone back and forth between Mexico and the U.S., but now many of the undocumented became trapped for fear of not getting back in. Between 1980 and 2000, the Mexican immigrant population increased from about 2.1 million to nearly 9.2 million.

During this time, our articles recognize the huge shift in migration and demographics but saw this as conjunctural: "In every period of economic and political crisis in the United States during this century the rulers have carried out mass deportations." But in 1987 U.S. imperialism was not on the verge of crisis and instability, but rather was about to gain a new lease on life. Furthermore, our defense of immigrants was problematic:

> "All the talk of 'illegal aliens' supposedly 'stealing American jobs' is hog-wash. 'Illegals' overwhelmingly work in the lowest-paid, dirtiest, backbreaking work no one else will do.… But these nativist appeals are having an effect, including among blacks, who are segregated at the bottom of American society and feel their precarious livelihoods threatened by the latest wave of low-wage immigrant labor.…
> "American workers who fall for the sucker-bait boss propaganda that their 'illegal' class brothers and sisters are 'stealing jobs' should try being a migrant farm worker.… And just as 'Buy American' ultimately means 'kill Asians'—witness the brutal murder of Chinese American Vincent Chin in Detroit by a racist auto foreman and his stepson who thought he 'looked Japanese'—so 'English only' has translated into 'kill Latinos'."
>
> —*WV* No. 427, 1 May 1987

While it was correct to fight the chauvinist protectionism pushed by the labor bureaucracy**,** we provided no working-class alternative to nativism and neoliberalism. Instead, we essentially echoed liberal compassion and "enlightened" consciousness-raising. To argue to white and black workers who had lost their jobs that it's better than being a migrant farm worker was a defense of the new liberal status quo.

The *WV* No. 427 article on immigration concludes that "Mexican nationalists repeat the lament of conservative dictator Porfirio Díaz: 'Poor Mexico, so far from God, so close to the United States.' Proletarian ***internationalists*** greet the fact that massive infusion of Hispanic workers from south of the border can serve as a human bridge for revolutionary class struggle throughout the Americas." This deeply flawed argument was repeated in our press for the next few decades.

We labeled as "nationalist" the recognition that Mexico is directly under the boot of U.S. imperialism and that this oppression fuels mass migrations. We countered with "internationalism," putting a gloss on this process and presenting immigrants as somehow inherently advanced. The claim that Mexican and Central American immigrants brought class-struggle traditions to the U.S. and were radicalizing the class here is idealist and, frankly, patronizing. As Marxists we understand that being determines consciousness. Immigrant workers without status are fed anti-black racism to head off multiracial unity and are kept in fear of deportation. Whatever the amount of struggle they waged in their home country, they are not automatically revolutionaries in the U.S.

The Clinton Years and Our Loss of Purpose

Before Clinton was elected president in 1992, Republicans had won the state of California in nearly every presidential election dating back to 1952. Since then, California has been a liberal Democratic Party stronghold. Under Clinton, there was a significant growth in international trade, massive offshoring of production and an explosion of international capital circulation, i.e., globalization. Clinton gave this profound shift a social liberal cover. "Communism is dead" and liberal capitalism is proclaimed the pinnacle of human civilization. The U.S. and its allies ruled the world in the name of liberal principles like "freedom and democracy" and "defense of the defenseless." California and particularly L.A. were key to this new world order of free trade, open capital markets and high levels of immigration.

By the early 1990s, Latinos had surpassed whites as L.A.'s largest racial/ethnic group. That decade, Latino immigrants in the city increased their organizing against their abysmal pay and conditions. We again attributed to them near-revolutionary consciousness that would revitalize labor. We also claimed to be unique in calling for full citizenship rights for immigrants, which was ludicrous. In our article "Latino Workers: New Force for Labor Struggle" (*WV* No. 541, 27 December 1991), we also argued:

> "The answer to anti-foreigner racism will come from united working-class struggle, in which the increasingly highly unionized immigrant workers can play a leading role. Examples of this range from the valiant Mexican women garment workers striking against the sweatshops of El Paso, to the Los Angeles 'Janitors for Justice' many of whom got their experience fighting for union rights in El Salvador."

But economic struggle alone cannot overcome the deep racial and ethnic divisions in the class. To accomplish that requires building a conscious class-struggle union leadership in opposition to trade-union bureaucrats who fuel these divisions.

Our press declared that the struggles of Latino immigrants were driving "the transformation of Los Angeles from a largely open-shop city to Strike City U.S.A." (*WV* No. 871, 26 May 2006). But L.A. was not and had not been an open-shop city for decades. While L.A. was an open shop in the lead-up to and aftermath of the 1910 bombing of the *Los Angeles Times* building—for which union ironworkers, the McNamara brothers, were convicted—this hadn't really been true since the 1930s.

The establishment of the CIO unions was a major catalyst for union growth in L.A. For example, following the 1936-37 sitdown strikes in Flint, Michigan, the UAW was recognized at GM assembly plants nationwide, including the South Gate plant in L.A. By 1939, the Teamsters had organized more than 25,000 truck drivers and become the city's largest union. And, of course, the ILWU longshore union was coastwide.

A useful book detailing the history of L.A. labor from 1880 to 2010 is *Sunshine Was Never Enough* by John Laslett. As he writes, "If there was any one year in which the open shop in Los Angeles can be said to have entered a period of terminal decline, 1937 was probably that year. No fewer than 113 organizing strikes, many of them successful, took place in the city.… By the time the U.S. entered World War II, the long reign of the open shop in Southern California was effectively over."

During the L.A. upheaval in 1992, we presented consciousness as having grown by leaps and bounds simply as a result of the outburst of elemental rage. We argued that it was "self-evident" that both capitalist parties are corrupt and, in effect, that no one had illusions in liberalism. In *WV* No. 551 (15 May 1992), we correctly called for the powerful L.A. unions such as longshore, aerospace and city workers to organize work stoppages and mass mobilizations in defense of the black community, later adding: "This is not 'pie in the sky'." But given that we were no longer trying to combat the pre-existing divisions in the class to unite it in such struggle, this was pie in the sky. No longer fighting for class-struggle leadership in the unions, we were just a pressure group calling on the labor bureaucrats to defend the ghetto that was rising up in opposition to the devastation that the bureaucrats had done nothing to fight.

We argued that the fact that the upheaval was multiracial was in itself a refutation of black nationalism as well as liberalism: "The L.A. upheaval and its sympathetic echoes throughout the country give the lie to the preachers of both white liberal and black nationalist despair." But black nationalist despair was a product of decades of white liberal betrayals. The aftermath of the upheaval only fueled the despair, as the competition for scarce resources increased. This gives context to Farrakhan's Million Man March a few years later under the call for black self-sufficiency. Instead of putting forward a scientific program to guide the working class along the road to power, we transformed Marxism into an idealistic spirit of rebellion.

We also described the world as defined by right-wing reaction instead of liberal triumphalism. Flowing from this, we set the main task to be beating back this reaction, presenting ourselves as unique in this regard. This was disorienting, to say the least. By painting the world as mired in a dark age with only us defend-

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ing democratic rights, we could push the most basic liberal demands as inherently revolutionary.

Dems Posture as Pro-Immigrant

The consequences of this logic played out clearly in California. In 1994, the anti-immigrant Prop 187 backed by Republican governor Pete Wilson was headed toward approval. We argued that "a demonstration of some tens of thousands of workers and youth" was "too hot for most of the Democratic politicians to handle" when in fact the demos were ***led*** by the liberal Democrats.

In our article "Mobilize California Labor to Smash Anti-Immigrant Racism!" (*WV* No. 608, 14 October 1994), we cite a TV ad for Prop 187 and continue:

> "This campaign is aided and abetted by a handful of black demagogues who argue that Latinos are 'stealing' black jobs and social services.… This is deadly dangerous for both Latinos and black people. It is vital for Latino workers to understand that the color line has always been the central, strategic question in racist, capitalist America. And blacks must understand that immigrant-bashing and anti-black racism go hand in hand."

But the liberal leadership of the anti-Prop 187 movement was also breeding division and deadly dangerous to black people and Latinos. It was not possible to make any headway in the fight to improve conditions for the oppressed in alliance with the liberal forces responsible for gutting education and social services in the name of "enlightened" values. The capitalists pit one section of the working class against another to weaken its struggles and obscure that they are the real enemy. Black parents in L.A. had legitimate grievances, even while bilingual education had suddenly become the main need of most students in neighborhood schools. To counter the channeling of this anger in a right-wing direction, socialists should have fought against the divisive liberal schemes and for ***more*** resources for quality, integrated and bilingual education, at the bosses' expense.

Instead, the *WV* No. 608 article attributed the problem entirely to the march of reaction, declaring: "The current sharp rise in anti-immigrant racism in the U.S. is part of a worldwide phenomenon, which has reached a fever pitch with fascist terror against immigrants in Europe.… With the destruction of the USSR, the imperialist bourgeoisies no longer feel the need to maintain the facade of granting asylum to refugees and are slamming the doors shut." But from NAFTA and the "end of welfare as we know it" to immigration policy, the Clinton administration was the face of ***unfettered neoliberalism with a social-liberal veneer***. His presidency represented a sharp shift in the Democratic Party away from any association with the New Deal and the left.

Nonetheless, simply declaring the Democrats to be as anti-immigrant as the Republicans reflected a refusal to take on liberalism's "enlightened" pro-immigrant posture. The opposition to Pete Wilson helped activate California's rapidly growing Latino population and turn them against the Republicans. Clinton's motto was "a new covenant with the American People." His gutting of welfare was couched as "empowering the poor and expanding the middle class." His 1996 platform said: "We deplore those who use the need to stop illegal immigration as a pretext for discrimination." It also offered that a Republican effort to bar the children of illegal immigrants from schools was "wrong, and forcing children onto the streets is an invitation for them to join gangs and turn to crime."

In the mid 1990s, the new AFL-CIO chief and DSA member, John Sweeney, personified the shift in labor toward support for neoliberalism. He endorsed liberal values and appealed to women, black people and immigrants but rejected old-school trade-union struggle as strikes continued to decline and unions shrank. Sweeney worked closely with Clinton and was on the advisory commission that endorsed Clinton's free-trade initiatives for the World Trade Organization.

Black rights were being thrown back in tandem with the unions, and segregation deepened. But this was uneven. For a layer of black households, income markedly increased throughout the '90s, while the situation for younger, non-college educated black people became much worse.

In L.A., we needed to fight for black, white and Latino working-class unity in explicit opposition to the liberal Democratic "unity" in support of the new status quo. Instead, we denied that black people's grievances were just, implicitly attributing those grievances to anti-immigrant backwardness, which could only serve to further drive black people into the arms of black nationalists. We also lectured Latinos that "the color line has always been the central, strategic question" in the U.S. But we failed to address ***why*** the fight against black oppression was their fight too. Latinos and black people have been and continue to be pitted against each other for jobs, education and housing. These divisions can only be overcome by motivating their shared material interests in joint class struggle against the capitalists and U.S. imperialism, not by moralistic browbeating.

How "Progressive" Identity Politics Played Out in L.A.

Our article, "Down With Capitalist Rulers' War Against Blacks, Immigrants!" (*WV* No. 724, 26 November 1999) acknowledges that the sense of unity between black people and Latinos during the 1992 riots did not long survive the suppression and continues:

> "Self-declared spokesmen for the black and Hispanic communities engaged in hostile competition over government money earmarked for rebuilding South Central and the other damaged neighborhoods. And in doing so, they used the same kind of demagogy as white racists.… And two years later, half of all black voters supported California Proposition 187."

But that's not what black and Latino community leaders in South L.A. were mainly doing. Karen Bass, for example, earned her spurs pushing "black-brown unity" behind Democratic Party liberals. The claim was that such multiclass coalitions linked to the city rulers would "uplift all of us." Black people and Latinos competed for "representation," but did so under the veneer of multiracial unity. This liberal model was not new, it just reflected the changed demographics. Tom Bradley, who was L.A.'s first black mayor from 1973 to '93, initiated a coalition of black Angelenos together with representatives of the liberal Jewish community, the growing Latino and Asian populations and the unions.

The *WV* No. 724 article notes that "behind the term 'people of color' is a political outlook and implicit program" and correctly argues against the false notions that white workers are to blame for racial oppression and that all "people of color" share common interests. But "people of color" ideology denied the hard color line in America and was designed to "unite" black and Latino struggle on the basis of liberalism, which is inherently divisive and a dead end. The article treats liberalism not as the period's dominant ruling-class ideology, but as the well-intentioned ideas of youth looking to fight racism.

Lastly, based on our years-long wrong assessment that "since the early '90s the pendulum of bourgeois politics has been swinging ever more strongly toward anti-immigrant nativism," the article projects "the repatriation of the 5.5 million 'illegal' immigrants now in the U.S." This was all very disorienting for our local in Los Angeles, whose ethnic makeup had already radically changed by late 1999, when the article was written.

Karen Bass and the Community Coalition

In 2006, during the Bush Jr. years and in the lead-up to Obama's election, L.A. was witness to massive protests for immigrant rights—over a million were in the streets on May Day. At this point, we were forced to deal with the changed demographics, but we never dealt with why our predictions did not happen. The demos were a classic popular-front movement of immigrant rights groups, liberal politicians, labor and the left. We recognized that the Democrats headed the movement, but we never fought to split it along class lines and provide revolutionary leadership to the immigrant rights struggle.

Our polemics against the left were not based on their alliance with the liberals, but on the scope of their demands—they called for amnesty, while we called for full citizenship rights. Similar to BLM, the immigrant rights movement had an underlying contradiction. There was an enormous desire to improve the status of immigrants, many of whom have toiled for over two decades without papers. But to truly achieve that requires confronting the interests of the bourgeoisie, which reaps massive profits from the superexploitation of the undocumented. Hence, the movement's bourgeois liberal program could only lead to defeat for the Latino working masses. Today, the left looks back to these protests as a model to repeat. Here is a case of first time tragedy, second time farce, as the liberals and union leaders have other ideas.

City of Los Angeles

DSA-LA City Council members Eunisses Hernandez and Hugo Soto-Martinez stand alongside Governor Gavin Newsom and Mayor Karen Bass in push for initiative to "help" the homeless by tearing down encampments. With "socialists" like these, who needs enemies?!

Only shortly before, L.A. had elected its first Latino mayor, Antonio Villaraigosa. He was a UTLA teachers union organizer who placed himself in the tradition of Bradley's multiracial coalition. The mayor and the head of the L.A. County Federation of Labor, Maria Elena Durazo, were prominent in the immigrant rights protests. They both campaigned and worked for Obama, who after the 2008 economic crisis became notorious as the biggest ever Deporter-in-Chief, with over three million deported. The Democrats promised immigration reform, but undocumented Latino immigrants and their children got no real status and no economic ladder to climb, while living and working conditions have deteriorated, like for the rest of the working class. This betrayal led many Latinos to support Trump in 2016 and even more to do so last year, and some others to look to Chicano/Mexican nationalism in despair.

Mayor Karen Bass's election in 2022 was seen as the culmination of decades of L.A.'s liberal "black-brown coalition" building. Like Brandon Johnson, who was elected Chicago mayor at the same time, she got her support from "progressive" black and Latino activists as well as labor—e.g., the "social justice" liberal-led teachers union, the transit and healthcare unions and the L.A. labor federation.

A month before the mayoral election, a recording was leaked of prominent Latino members of the L.A. City Council and the Latino head of the L.A. labor federation "discussing strategies for using the city's redistricting process to maximize Latina/o political power and dilute the power of Black voters." Nury Martinez, then head of the city council, spewed racist crap against the city's Oaxacan indigenous and black communities. As NPR noted, "What Nury Martinez was heard saying on this leaked tape were just about the worst things you could say as a politician in a city like Los Angeles, where cross-racial coalitions are so important in politics."

Erika Smith, a black columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote that the substance of the recording confirms the "worst fears of many Black Angelenos: that Latino politicians treat political power as a zero-sum game. That because of their numbers, they will take over the leadership of the city, and that because of their racist beliefs, they will ignore our needs." Smith concluded that the incident had shattered the popular narrative of Los Angeles—and California more generally—being a "multicultural mecca, where Black and brown people build alliances to work together…". The recordings captured that lurking beneath the multiracial veneer is the vicious competition over shrinking resources inherent to decaying U.S. capitalism.

What does L.A.'s black population need? The same things as the Latino and other working masses: reindustrialization and union jobs, decent integrated housing and education near where they work and free, quality healthcare. The only way to get anything for black, brown and working-class L.A. is to wage integrated class struggle against Karen Bass and the capitalist interests she represents. This requires a break with the liberal forces overseeing the devastation.

The liberal multiracial coalition paved the way for the current polarizations and rising reaction, driving black people and Latinos toward Trump. When running for mayor, Bass referred to the decades of progress since the 1990s when things were so bad and how all that was under threat. Her Community Coalition claimed to "unite the voices of Black, Brown, Indigenous, and people of color to bring about social change together. CoCo works on the frontlines of social change to dismantle systemic racism and economic inequity." But racist oppression and economic inequity have only gotten worse.

A 2016 research paper put out by Duke University, "The Color of Wealth in Los Angeles," noted that black and Mexican households have 1 percent of the wealth of whites in Los Angeles—or one cent for every dollar. The median value of liquid assets was $0 and $7 for Mexicans and other Latinos, respectively, but was $110,000 for white households. At the same time, there is gentrification of the barrios. Between 2010 and 2016, the median monthly rent in Boyle Heights—a historic and impoverished Mexican area—jumped from around $1,500 to $2,200. Today, it's $2,400. Actual mariachis were evicted from a building renamed "Mariachi Crossing" for the explicit purpose of making way for wealthy tenants.

A Program for L.A.

The DSA-LA, which currently has four elected Dems (over one-quarter of the seats) on the city council, put out a "Program for LA" for 2022 that correctly notes that in the early 1990s a "multiracial coalition" cohered "to challenge the Republican stronghold on politics and reinvigorate the stagnant Democratic Party establishment that managed the interests of a different faction, primarily business and real estate, within California's capitalist class." They also observe

that "the dominant power structure within LA County can be described as a status quo coalition which invokes 'progressive' language while espousing neoliberal policies and views."

But they then propose to rebuild the very alliance with liberalism that has screwed L.A.—which is what their electeds do in L.A. now. They essentially argue for a new multiracial coalition, with better liberal forces, to push a bunch of liberal reforms, while conveniently not mentioning Karen Bass. They say, "This coalition is not a single unified power" and that building an alternative to the status quo coalition will "require winning over some elements of the coalition"—i.e., break the liberal "progressives" away from the particularly hated Dems like those on the leaked recording.

The upshot, of course, is that they perniciously give a "socialist" cover to the worsening situation. One of their city council electeds, Eunisses Hernandez, tried to sell out her constituents who organized a tenants union and had been on a rent strike for almost five years, making a deal that favored the landlords at the expense of the tenants. The group of local DSA electeds includes the infamous Nithya Raman, a Zionist supporter of genocide, whom the DSA-LA endorsed based on her fight for "housing." She voted for Bass's new racist police chief, despite DSA-LA's call on Bass to "reject and withdraw the nomination." Another elected on city council, Hugo Soto-Martinez, puts forward useless legislation in response to mass deportations, such as "requiring businesses report ICE actions in the city." So, now the bosses who profit from superexploitation are going to protect immigrants.

WV Photo

L.A., June 14: Spartacists fight for united working-class struggle to beat back escalating ICE raids and roundups.

Both the DSA electeds and the left blame racism and the rise of reaction on Trumpism, but this obscures how liberalism has been at the root of the problem and responsible for many years of attacks and betrayals. Trump's second election reflected the death of liberalism as U.S. imperialism's dominant ideology. The liberal "multiracial coalition" was given a hammer blow by Trump, who boasts of having won almost half the Latino vote and an increased share of the black vote. Bass, who wrote the "George Floyd Justice in Policing Act" a few years ago, has since appointed a white racist police chief in the name of "boosting officer morale" prior to the Olympics, when lots of "morale" will be needed to sweep skid row and lock up the black and brown poor. In response to the wildfires, she's doing all she can to rebuild wealthy enclaves, while the housing crisis worsens for the vast majority of Angelenos.

The social decay inherent in the imperialist epoch can only be overcome by a class-independent fight against ***both*** wings of the imperialist bourgeoisie. For the workers movement to continue on the decades-old failed course of political blocs with liberals only ensures that there will be no actual fight to "make LA for the working people," as the DSA claims to stand for—much less to defend immigrants and fight for black and brown liberation. Our task, in L.A. and nationally, is to bridge the gulf between the left and the black, Latino and immigrant working masses by showing that their struggles are connected to the immediate and historic interests of all workers.

Thousands of young Latinos have been out in the streets in L.A. to protest against Trump's deportations, but they are isolated and abandoned by the liberals. The left in L.A., which was never very influential to begin with, is seen by workers either as irrelevant or as liberal sellouts. The central task for the left in L.A.—and for our party—is to overcome this divide in order to be able to guide much-needed defensive struggles. Hopefully, in laying out the lessons of past decades, this document will help us to intervene today to maximum effect. ■

DSA Letter...

(continued from page 2)

Democratic Party—would continue indefinitely because any consistent clean-breaker would be on the outside looking in.

Although you correctly want to defend the JBA's work, your argumentation is confused. You say that our "characterization of the DSA as part of the Democratic Party represents an unforced error." But the DSA is part of the Dems. Everyone inside the DSA recognizes as much. The organization was founded to realign the Democratic Party and measures its success by the size of its stable of Democratic electeds. The sectarians, of course, are quick to point out this connection. But you do not have to deny reality to defend doing work inside the DSA.

What matters is not whether the DSA's organizational relationship to the Democrats is similar to the Communist Party's. Rather, what matters is one's ***purpose*** on the inside. If the purpose is to build or even tolerate support for "progressive" Democrats like AOC and Zohran Mamdani, then one's work is unprincipled. That is what the DSA leadership as well as DSA Left caucuses like Reform and Revolution do. But if one fights to split the DSA from the Democratic Party, as the JBA does, that is principled. The JBA's purpose is to break the "big tent" politics that chain the subjective socialists in the DSA to those who want a realigned Democratic Party. Most recently, JBA caucus members fought to get a clean break resolution onto the floor of last weekend's DSA National Convention; while failing at that, they attended the convention in order to expose Zohran's attempt to breathe fresh life into the Democratic Party as damaging to the socialist movement.

You referenced the entry of the Communist Party of China (CPC) into the bourgeois nationalist Guomindang in the early 1920s. It is indeed useful to look at how Trotsky viewed this question. In a letter to one of his U.S. supporters, he wrote:

> "The entering itself in 1922 was not a crime, possibly not even a mistake, especially in the south, under the assumption that the Kuomintang at this time had a number of workers and the young Communist party was weak and composed almost entirely of intellectuals.…In this case, the entry would have been an episodic step to independency, analogous to a certain degree to your entering the Socialist Party. The question is ***what was their purpose in entering and what was their subsequent policy?"*** [emphasis added]

In 1925, a revolutionary wave surged over China. Fearing that their rule was threatened, the Guomindang leaders unleashed a wave of persecutions directed against the workers and peasants, and the CPC itself. In this situation, it was necessary for the CPC to split with the Guomindang and openly step to the fore as the leadership of the mass struggles in China. This the CPC, taking the advice of the Stalin-Bukharin leadership of the Comintern, refused to do. Instead, it capitulated down the line to the Guomindang, leading to a horrific defeat.

The betrayal was not setting foot inside the Guomindang. The betrayal was the CPC's abandonment of an independent proletarian perspective and its political subordination to the national bourgeoisie.

JBA should be judged according to the same criteria. Notably, while sectarian leftists condemn JBA as opportunist for simply having set foot inside the DSA, opportunists in that organization denounce JBA as sectarian for drawing a hard line against subordination to the Democrats. These responses, together with a review of JBA's track record, confirm that the caucus is doing what it should be doing where it might actually have a positive impact. ■

Boeing...

(continued from page 12)

organize the unorganized, while working to break down the divisions that hold the union back.

Boeing is a past master at divide and conquer: pit new hires against more established workers, union workers against the unorganized, the legacy Boeing workforce against the legacy McDonnell Douglas. Machinists must counter this with a strategy capable of uniting workers across these divisions—including their class brothers and sisters in the aerospace and defense industries (as well as the broader St. Louis labor movement) in a common defensive front to beat back Boeing and other employers.

The picket line is ***a battle line in the class struggle***—Machinists must fight to stop anything from going in or out of the plants. Boeing is forcing probationary employees to scab or lose their jobs—appeal to them to join the strike and the union as full members. District 751 members are pissed off at how their strike ended and are back to getting pounded by Boeing—appeal to them to lend a helping hand by downing their tools and sticking it to the company.

But the only appeal the IAM tops have made is to Republican Senators Josh Hawley and Eric Schmitt to get Boeing back to the negotiating table. While this time the union leadership wants to work with Republicans instead of Democrats, its reliance on the bosses' politicians is just as much of a dead end as before. The only way that workers will get what they want is if Boeing is forced back to the table, tail between its legs, after a projection of union strength.

For Union Dominance at Boeing

Many workers at Boeing and beyond voted for Trump in November out of expectation that he would provide some economic relief. But no relief has materialized. Since he took office, some scattered strikes have broken out—overwhelmingly in response to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. But union bureaucrats have isolated and limited these strikes so as not to cross Trump (or Democratic politicians) as he goes about remaking the U.S. economy in anticipation of increased military conflict ahead. A number of these strikes have occurred in the defense industry, where the outlook for the CEOs of Lockheed Martin, Pratt & Whitney and Boeing is very rosy. But it is another story altogether for workers at these companies—they are falling ever more deeply into the hole and have to fight to dig themselves out. Good times for the defense industry amid a buildup toward war with China translates into nothing but harder times for defense workers—and only some serious struggle can change that.

Trump has been practicing his "Art of the Deal" on the world stage. Who is making out like bandits? Only Boeing, not the Machinists. The company, thanks to the F-47 and other contracts, now sits on a massive war chest that it can use to crush the strike. Machinists, though, have to fight just to defend themselves. F-47 jobs under worse conditions provide no future for Boeing or any other workers. Leaning on Trump or the Democrats is not going to help matters. The only perspective that will make a difference is to look to establish ***union dominance*** at Boeing.

The quality and safety problems long plaguing Boeing's commercial operations have also cropped up in its military production. This management-created chaos in the build process mirrors the chaos this country's rulers create abroad. And that chaos abroad always comes back to hurt workers here—in the form of increased regimentation, higher prices for basic goods, less tolerance for their struggles and greater sacrifice of their and their children's lives in military adventures, to name a few. Trump selling jets and munitions to Israel to bomb babies in Gaza no more benefits the Machinists than when Biden was doing the same. A strong union would assert control over safety and quality enforcement as well as where the material Machinists manufacture goes and what it is used for.

District 837 Machinists would do well to learn from the efforts of IAM 751 Mobilize!, a group of rank-and-file Machinists who came together to fight for a strong strike in opposition to the union bureaucracy. Mobilize! militants showed the way by turning the sole strike rally called by union leaders (as a talk shop for Democratic politicians) into a real display of force. They led hundreds to the picket lines, organized against the company's lousy offers and called to escalate the strike in various ways.

Despite their best efforts, they could not turn the strike around. But they knew that the only way forward was to take strike leadership out of the hands of the do-nothing bureaucrats and put it in their own. The same goes today in St. Louis. District 837 Machinists must organize a strike committee to set their strike on a new course: ***Mobilize labor's strength—bring the probationary workers in, build picket lines nobody dares cross! Fight for union dominance at Boeing and across the defense industry!*** ■

WORKERS VANGUARD on Boeing
workersvanguard.org/topics/boeing

Philippines...

(continued from page 3)

and deporting him to the Hague, most of the left celebrated this as a victory. From Akbayan to Makabayan and beyond, so-called socialists are demanding that the Philippines rejoin the ICC so the ICC can prosecute Duterte's henchmen who carried out mass slaughter under the banner of the war on drugs.

The ICC's business has always been prosecuting Third World leaders who fell out of favor with U.S. imperialism, from Africa to Serbia to Venezuela and beyond. The one exception—the arrest warrant for Netanyahu—remained a dead letter precisely because it went against American interests. The arrest and trial of Rodrigo Duterte is business as usual for the ICC: targeting a figure who's inconvenient for U.S. interests in the Philippines. This does nothing to help the struggle to avenge the victims of the Duterte regime. By associating the cause with the imperialist oppressors, it alienates the people and helps Dutertistas. It has allowed Duterte's former police chief Bato Dela Rosa, whose hands are covered in the masses' blood, to posture as the defender of the nation. We need a fundamentally different strategy, one that unites the masses and brings them to their feet, instead of relying on Marcos and the pro-imperialist ICC.

The struggle for justice for the victims of the war on drugs throws a spotlight on the shadowy machinery of torture and assassination which the oligarchs deploy to keep the Philippines in chains. The police and army officers who carried out these killings are the backbone of the whole system of neocolonial oppression, armed and trained by the imperialists. For that reason, it will take a determined mass struggle against the imperialists and their local flunkies to finally win justice for Duterte's victims. A first step to rallying the masses behind this cause is to expose the truth about the victims, who was killed and who was responsible for the killings. To the liberal politicians who pledge their loyalty to this cause, we demand that they take action themselves instead of insisting that nothing can be done in the Philippines. ***Tell us the truth: open the archives of the police, the AFP and their torture centers!***

The Trump administration is cutting military aid around the world, but the Philippines is one place where the money is flowing in the other direction. U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth is promising to "share burdens," arming and training the Philippine military and developing infrastructure that will allow the U.S. to "defend the Philippines' sovereignty" against "China's aggression." This speaks volumes about the importance of the Philippines to U.S. imperialism's main strategic aim of strangling China. But instead of building an anti-Trump campaign to throw out the U.S. troops and bases, the Filipino left's main focus is…exposing Sara for not standing up to Chinese aggression in the "West Philippine Sea"!

Competing with the Dutertistas on the basis of Filipino nationalism does not advance the interests of the Filipino masses! It subordinates them to the Filipino capitalists who are subordinated to U.S. imperialism, and it divides the workers of the world. The Filipino nation and the hundreds of millions of Chinese workers and peasants have a common enemy in U.S. imperialism. These two nations currently stand divided because the leadership of each is capitulating to imperialism. The bureaucrats running the Communist Party of China reject the communist strategy of mobilizing the toiling masses of the world to struggle for the overthrow of imperialism. Their false perspective of developing socialism only in their own country surrounded by world imperialism leads them to look instead to alliances with reactionary politicians like the Dutertes and to a military strategy that tramples on the sensibilities of oppressed nations, like firing water cannons at Filipino fisherfolk to assert their control over the Southeast Asian Sea. For their part, the Filipino left's alliance with supporters of U.S. imperialism in a common campaign against China alienates the Chinese masses and binds them closer to the CPC. The struggle for the liberation of the Philippines will never go forward under the American boot. Likewise, as long as they see the Filipino left siding with the U.S. against China, the millions and millions of Chinese workers and peasants will never support leftist struggles in the Philippines.

To undercut these divisions, the Filipino left must break its ties to the liberal lapdogs of U.S. imperialism. The struggle to defend Philippine sovereignty begins by opposing the U.S.! Building an anti-imperialist front of the workers and peasants of the Philippines and China is the best possible blow against U.S. imperialism, and also the best way to undermine the reactionary nationalist strategy of the CPC. ***Don't be an imperialist running dog for Donald Trump's anti-China war drive!*** Joint defense of the Southeast Asian Sea against the imperialist oppressors! Rip out the fishing barriers! Share the waters!■

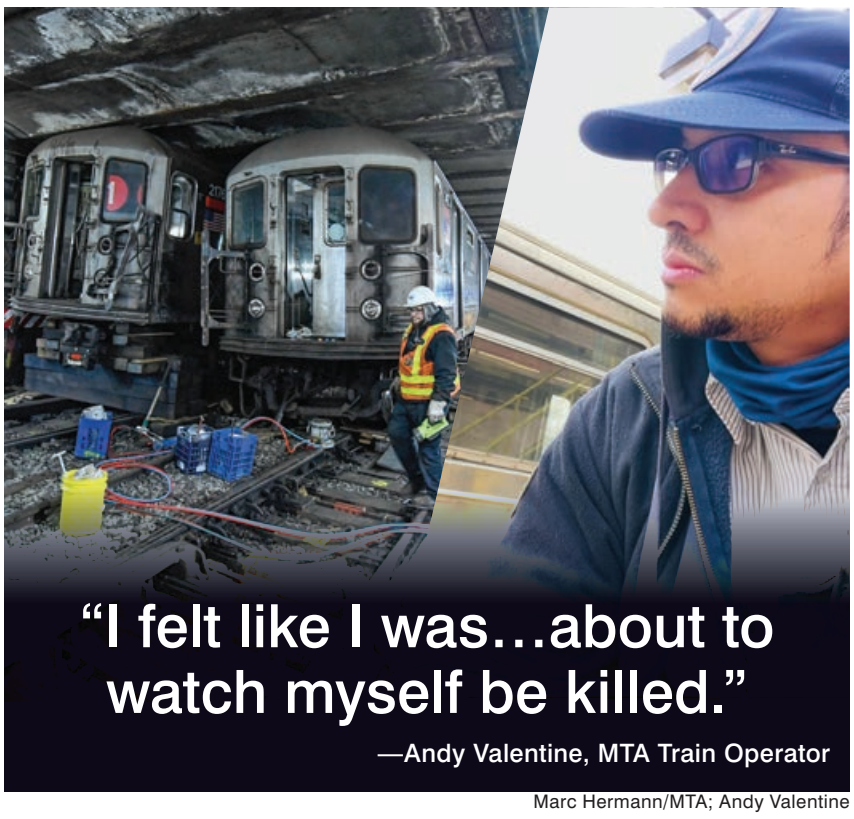
Valentine...

(continued from page 12)

contempt for workers' lives and livelihoods. *Workers Vanguard* agrees with TWFU that transit workers need to fight now for ***elected union safety committees with the right to shut down unsafe work***, in other words ***workers control of safety***. Of course, this must be coupled with the broader struggle to get ***billions of dollars for maintaining and rebuilding*** the country's mass transit systems. If workers, not management, had been in charge of moving the trains under 96th Street that day, the collision would not have happened.

Arbitration Is a Trap

Going into arbitration, Valentine received some support from union reps and legal representation from Local 100, but there was no attempt to highlight the MTA's outrageous vendetta against him or to mobilize union members in his defense. Moreover, since his firing, top TWU officers have been maintaining a guilty silence over what happened to him, not offering a penny or even a word in Valentine's defense. Because the TWU's pro-capitalist bureaucrats hang their careers on cozy relations with the MTA bosses and their politicians, they defend and have no alternative to the rigged system of binding arbitration. While the bosses routinely violate the contract, the TWU tops just as routinely hide behind New York's anti-strike Taylor Law as an all-purpose excuse to not wage real fights.



Marc Hermann/MTA; Andy Valentine

At the very least, every union member should have been informed about the company victimization of Valentine as soon as he was handed a DAN (disciplinary action notification). On the day of his kangaroo court arbitration proceedings, hundreds of TWUers should have been mobilized to demonstrate outside of the MTA's "House of Pain" at 2 Broadway to demand the dropping of all charges and opening up of the phony proceedings to the watchful eyes of the union ranks. Harsh company discipline should always be met with a harsh response that brings union power to bear. This frame-up should have been spiked in a militant and timely fashion.

It is not too late to win Valentine's job back and in the process chip away at the weakness felt by transit workers. Through efforts like those of the Ad Hoc Committee to Reinstate T/O Andy Valentine, fighters within the ranks can begin to establish the union as the kind of organization that it needs to be—one that aggressively defends every worker against any and all of the bosses' attacks. To make this happen, it is important to realize that binding arbitration is a trap. Arbitration removes agency from the union and blunts its power. With Trump shredding the union contracts of federal workers, now is the time for serious defensive struggles, not rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.

Underscoring how biased and vicious the MTA's "plantation justice" system is, an MTA arbitrator reportedly ruled in late July that the supervisor operating the train during the 96th Street collision can return to full safety-sensitive service. So, while Valentine lost his job and health insurance and struggles daily just to feed and support his family, guilty bosses are back on the job like the crash they caused never happened.

Valentine recently filed a complaint in New York State court to have his arbitration ruling vacated, a necessary step in the fight to get his job back. However, TWU members must understand that the bosses' court system is no more "neutral" than the MTA's system of "plantation justice." Transit workers need to turn Valentine's case into a clarion call to fight management in every corner of the industry. "An injury to one is an injury to all" may be just a platitude for sellout union bureaucrats, but it's a burning reality for workers everywhere, especially in this period of expanding attacks on labor, immigrants, leftists and all the oppressed.

Workers Vanguard encourages our readers to join the fight to get Valentine rehired: Donate to the "Fired! MTA Ignores NTSB Report! Blames Andy" GoFundMe page for his legal defense and check out the "All Out for Andy" Facebook page for more information about his case. Also, learn more about TWFU at twfu.org and on Facebook, X and YouTube.■

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WORKERS VANGUARD

How to Win This One

St. Louis Boeing Strike

AUGUST 19—The fighting Machinists are back on the picket lines. Only now, the battle has shifted from Puget Sound to the St. Louis area, where IAM District 837 members at Boeing Air Dominance make fighter jets and weapons systems for the U.S. military. In the lead-up to the strike, union members said "hell no" to not one, but two BS offers that their leadership tried to pass off on them. For over two weeks, they have been on strike, demanding better compensation, job security and a little respect. But this class contest is not headed in the right direction: The company is playing chess while IAM leaders play checkers. This must change—the ranks want to play to win, and all the union's moves must reflect that.

Boeing is running a scab operation, rather than simply waging a war of attrition, like it did for most of the recent District 751 strike in Seattle. If District 837 is going to come out of this conflict on top, the union ranks are going to have to draw their own lessons from that earlier battle and escalate ***now***. Last fall, the 33,000-strong District 751 membership held the line against Boeing for nearly two months. But their leaders did everything to ***demobilize*** the strike, because a strong strike would have caused fits for the Democrats who they wanted to help stay in power. Picket lines were kept small and porous, no effort was made to reach out to other Boeing unions or area workers to honor the lines, talk of "one day longer, one day stronger" demoralized strikers when it clearly wasn't true. The moment Boeing said "enough," the union leadership rolled over and embraced a rotten deal that fell far short of what could have been won—and now the company is back to lording it over the Machinists.

WV Photo

August 5: IAM picketers at Boeing plant in St. Charles, Missouri.

Today, the District 837 leadership, which also never wanted a strike, is following the exact same losing playbook as their Seattle cohorts—right down to peddling the "one day longer" nonsense. A union is stronger when it is united and enforces its picket lines. If anything, sticking to the Seattle playbook will have even more disastrous results in St. Louis. After all, a much smaller fraction of Machinists is currently on strike, and workers across the country are under the gun, from the shredding of federal union contracts to the ICE workplace raids. Victory is not out of grasp, but District 837 members have no time to waste. They must take steps immediately to build mass picket lines and stop the scabs, cut off parts deliveries and

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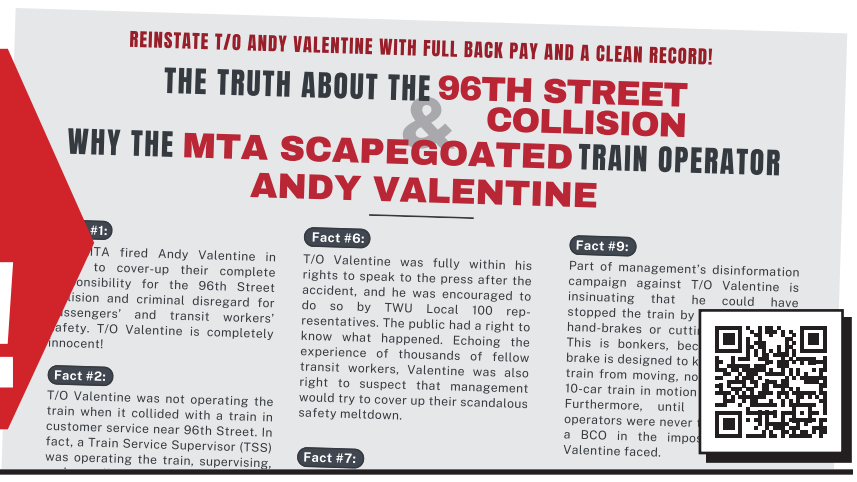
NYC Train Operator Axed for Doing His Job

Reinstate Andy Valentine!



The Ad Hoc Committee to Reinstate Train Operator Andy Valentine's June 12 fact sheet. For more information: *twfu.org/2025-valentine*

On 4 January 2024, like every day of his eight-year career at NYC Transit, Train Operator Andy Valentine worked his job with skill and integrity. But that day, Valentine also acted with selfless courage, when a train with malfunctioning brakes on which he was working as a guide—not as the operator—collided underground with a train in passenger service, causing at least 24 injuries and millions in damages. Valentine did everything humanly possible to try to stop the train, helped to save his conductor in the seconds before impact and remained in the smoke-filled wreckage to assist evacuating passengers with Fire Department personnel.

As a reward, Valentine's bosses at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) viciously fired him, after plotting to scapegoat him and cover up their own criminal mistakes and disregard for safety. Burying the truth about the 96th Street crash and derailment was no easy feat because news reports, interviews and the extensively researched National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) report unquestionably prove that Valentine was innocent.

Management's biggest problem was that one of their own, a Train Service Supervisor, was actually operating the train, supervising and overall in charge when it crashed. He was the one who should have stopped the train the moment that radio communication with Valentine ceased or upon getting Valentine's repeated calls to "stop the train!" Management should have known that train crews' handheld radios are unreliable in this area. Equally damning, it was supervision who routed the two trains onto a collision course.

MTA Labor Relations cooked up bogus charges against Valentine for rules and procedures that didn't even exist before the crash. They then used one of their so-called "neutral" arbitrators to terminate him this April. When the arbitrator blatantly pandered to the bosses by disallowing the NTSB report into evidence, Valentine told coworkers that his heart dropped, sensing that he was about to become another victim of the company's notorious system of "plantation justice."

Afterwards, angry transit workers from different rank-and-file groups within Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100—including Transit Workers for a Fighting Union (TWFU), Local 100 Fightback and the Stronger Together caucus headed by Evangeline Byars—founded the "Ad Hoc Committee to Reinstate T/O Andy Valentine" to publicize his case, raise funds for his legal defense and militantly demand that he be rehired with full back pay and a clean record. Upon hearing about Valentine's plight, Railroad Workers United, a national pan-union organization advocating for rank-and-file railroad workers, also publicized the case and gave welcome support. Importantly, these groups came together in a united front to fight for the defense of Valentine and the union, despite their differences over how to transform Local 100 into a fighting force. Every Local 100 member has an interest in taking up the fight to ***reinstate Andy Valentine!***

Service Over Safety

The real cause of the 96th Street crash was the MTA's de facto policy of service over safety, which directly threatens workers and passengers alike. As summarized in the Ad Hoc Committee's June 12 leaflet: the transit bosses "inexcusably placed a train full of passengers in front of a disabled train with faulty brakes, while making a risky move in a notorious radio dead zone!"

Management was undoubtedly furious that Valentine spoke powerfully to the press soon after the crash about the bosses' total safety meltdown, telling an ABC reporter that "I felt like I was a spectator about to watch myself be killed." That isn't hyperbole to millions of NYC subway riders, who experience the MTA's crumbling infrastructure daily. In fact, there were two other subway derailments within 22 days of the January 4 collision.

NYC's subway system is a microcosm of U.S. capitalism in decay. The city's huge extremes of wealth—with gleaming skyscrapers rising just blocks from dilapidated housing projects—are mirrored underground. The MTA is slowly upgrading to modern communications-based train control, yet still relies on obsolete signal systems inside over 100-year-old tunnels! It is a metropolis gutted of necessary investment in infrastructure. Just to keep the trains running under such decay, the MTA bosses give a backseat to safety.

During last year's Local 100 elections, TWFU fought for safety under the slogan "We shouldn't have to kill ourselves to do our jobs!" Valentine's case underscores the urgency of strengthening the union as the front-line defense against the bosses'

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